

4. LIVING IN BAGHDAD, IRAQ

1966-1969

SLIDES 368-391

July 2003/November 2006

My assignment in Iraq

From November 1966 till November 1969 I was assigned as an FAO associate expert to the Iraqi Institute for Cooperatives and Agricultural Extension, a joint Iraqi-United Nations Development Program, which was implemented by the Food & Agricultural Organization of the UN.

The main task of the Institute was to train staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in modern cooperative and extension management practices for staff which was to be assigned to guide farmers in improved management in the new land reform areas of Iraq. The Iraqi land reform program was initiated in the early 1960s and in 1966 only a very small percentage of the ministry's staff was familiar with modern management practices. The teaching staff of the institute consisted of ten international FAO specialists and an equal number of national specialists.

My main assignment, as junior specialist, was to assist in the cooperative development and cooperative marketing programs. In particular to give the institutes students guidance in conducting formal and informal surveys to enable them to quickly understand the situation in the land reform areas to which they were assigned. With my counterpart Mr. Mawfak, we designed a format for standard annual evaluation surveys of cooperative and agricultural development in land reform areas. We tested our survey system in Baghdad Province and later in other provinces of Iraq. In testing our survey program we took the institute's students to join us in the field work to familiarize them with the field situation.

Another assignment was an evaluation study of the Mussayab project a large irrigation scheme, which was being renovated. Being the only staff member of the institute with research experience, I was the de facto director of studies of the Mussayab evaluation study.

My house in Baghdad

In Baghdad I hired a mustamel or pavilion -image 368-, which was located on the grounds of a larger villa. The first one and half year I shared this with my friend Hans Bos, a civil engineer working for a UN telecommunications project- image 379.

The address of my mustamel was in Mansur Street, one of the new areas of Baghdad, on the west side of the river Tigris. My mustamel consisted of a living room-image 372 , a kitchen, two small bedrooms -image 373- and a large roof terrace, on which I slept in the open air during the period April- October – image 374, following the local custom. It was a nice experience to fall asleep under the very clear Baghdad sky looking at the thousands of twinkling stars. There was still no pollution and as it never rains during April-October, it was a marvelous experience. While the day temperature during that

period fluctuated between 45 and 52C, the night temperature always dropped to 20-25 C, an invigorating temperature. One actually needed a blanket to keep warm.

The house had also a small front and rear garden, where I grow grapes- image 371 and Bougainville- image 376.

My man servant Daniel

To help with the house management I had a man servant, called Daniel, an Assyrian Christen.-Image 370. Daniel cooked, did the laundry and cleaned the house and bought the food for us on the market. Daniel was a nice person and taught me a lot about Iraq.

My Volkswagen Beatle car.

For personal transport I owned a Volkswagen “Beatle”-image 369, on which I had mounted oversized wheels and special desert air filters, to cope with the desert conditions of Iraq. In spite of the very dusty circumstances in Iraq, especially on the desert sand tracks, I could trust my “Beatle” which always kept running. I have driven tens of thousands of kilometers with my car, much of it on desert sand tracks to visit archeological sites, but got very seldom stuck. Most of my weekends and free national holidays, I made trips to archeological and historical sites in Iraq. For images of these see sections 2 and 3 of my Iraq collection of slides.

My neighbors

My neighbors were Basil and Olive Loveridge, a nice British couple. On Fridays, the free day in Iraq, we were often invited for lunch by Olive: the menu was Indian curry or a typical British dish.

My music activities

Together with my friends Steven – piano and Anita Post – flute we regularly played music, initially only trio sonatas. Later we were joined by Ersang, flute & violin and Ghazi, hobo, two enthusiastic Iraqi musicians, also dedicated to 18 Century baroque music. This combination allowed us to play a wide variety of trios, quartets and quintets, in particular as I played the entire range of recorders from sopranino, soprano, alto and tenor recorders in addition to the traverso flute. . Together we gave a number of house concerts for our mutual friends. Apart from being one of the players, I was also the announcer of the program and liked to add some musicological information on the pieces we were going to perform, which was much appreciated by our public.

Our horses

Together my friends Klaas Koster and Wessel Swart we bought two horses: Marduk and Aladin. About twice each week we made a trip on horseback in the surroundings of the stables where our horses were lodged, on the east side of Baghdad, some 40 km drive. Galloping in the desert in the cool afternoon was an extraordinary and joyful experience, seeing the beautiful colors of the desert in the evening.

July 2003/ November 2006

Charles van Santen